



Special note: The University's convocation ceremony, originally scheduled for Sunday, August 28 at 6:00pm was cancelled as a result of the adverse weather conditions related to Hurricane Irene. The text of planned remarks follows.

CONVOCATION 2011

PLANNED REMARKS FROM INTERIM PRESIDENT JOHN BRAMLEY

Thank you, Professor Tyzbir. And welcome to faculty, staff, students, guests, and especially all of you out there aglow in your residential area colors – the Class of 2015. We are deeply pleased that you have chosen to enroll at the University of Vermont for your college education; and we look forward to joining you in the transformative experiences of your years on our campus.

To the UVM community, I am honored to be among you, working again with so many longtime friends and colleagues. I am eager to get on with the challenges and opportunities of the academic year ahead—continuing the trajectory of our university's rise under the leadership of President Daniel Mark Fogel and setting the table for next year when we will welcome the twenty-sixth president of the University of Vermont.

Convocation is an occasion to celebrate beginnings. Though the days are growing shorter, the nights cooler, and perhaps we even start to see a few maple leaves changing hue far too early, these certain signs of autumn run counter to the spring-like spirit of new life that is a college campus at the outset of fall semester.

Yet, amidst this joy, I must confess to a somber moment on my own part. That was in the privacy of my office in Waterman Building, writing correspondence to the returning senators of the Student Government Association, when it dawned on me that *these folks were not even born when I started my work at UVM.*

It's all right, I got over it. Many of us in the business of working with this wonderful renewable resource called "young people" know well these occasional sobering suggestions of time's march. And while few of my vintage are exactly thrilled to be reminded of our age, there is also reward in that. Seeing a new class of students enter the university cannot help but take us back to fond memories of our own first days of college.

As you might have gathered from this accent, my own college years were spent thousands of miles from here. In that time and place, a "college search" was a very different process and so it was that I found myself arriving in the far northeast corner of England to attend Newcastle University sight unseen.

Though I wasn't so far from my boyhood home in Wales, this was new territory to me. 1968 was an era of great transition in the UK, just as it was here. The city of Newcastle and the surrounding area struggled economically as the coal-mining and industry that had long defined it was shutting down.

On campus, dorm space at the university in the heart of the city was limited and full to capacity when I arrived. It is certainly not a totally unfamiliar concept to you new students who might be living in triples for the time being, but at Newcastle the space crunch was quite a bit more dire. The women got first priority in the residence halls and the men... well, that's how I came to spend my freshman year living fifteen miles from campus in the small seaside village of Whitley Bay. (Any of

you who think I was enjoying a sort of idyll at the seashore have clearly never experienced the wind off the North Sea on a January morning.)

My landlady for that year, a coalminer's widow renting out rooms to keep together body and soul, was not your conventional RA. And my public transit ride into the city was not a stroll to morning classes across a leafy quad. But my housing arrangements of that year came with their own kind of blessing. I was immersed me in that community, in that place, and in that time in a way that provided invaluable lessons and opportunities for personal growth.

This, you may be relieved to know, is not to suggest that we'll be shipping any of you off to rented rooms in St. Albans. Rather, it's to suggest that valuable experiences and life lessons are not always where you expect to find them. But you will only find them if you enter this place with an open heart and mind... determined to be a *part* of it.

We are the University of Vermont. You are the University of Vermont. Those who study and write about food cite the concept of *terroir*, a French word meaning the distinct sense of the land, of a particular place that is embodied in the food a region produces. Well, I would assert that there is a sort of educational *terroir* going on here at the University of Vermont. Though we are an institution with national and international reach in the students and scholars we draw and in the impact of our research endeavors, the educational experience we share with our undergraduates is very much intertwined with this Green Mountain landscape and its people.

We see this all the way back to the founding of our university. November 3, 1791, UVM's non-denominational charter was the first in the country—that bears repeating, *the first in the country*—to specify

clearly that the “rules, regulations, and by-laws shall not tend to give preference to any religious sect or denomination whatsoever.”

Samuel Williams, an under-sung hero of our early history who worked together with Ira Allen in UVM’s founding, wrote that this groundbreaking unifying of religious freedom and education was in keeping with the values of the people of Vermont.

“It is not barely *toleration*, but *equality* which the people aim at,” Samuel Williams wrote. “Toleration implies either a power or a right in one party to bear with the other, and seems to suppose that the governing party are in possession of the truth, and that the others are full of errors... The body of the people in this community carry their ideas of religious liberty much farther than this.”

That broad spirit of equality continues today and is, indeed, reaffirmed with each incoming class through the pledge that you will soon read together on the Green in our twilight induction ceremony.

In the full spirit of equality that is at the bedrock of our institution, I urge you to become fully part of this community during your years here—not just the University of Vermont community, but the Burlington community, the greater Vermont community. Dare to weave yourself into the fabric of your new home. Volunteer at a food bank; work with kids at the King Street Center; join with your neighbors in the Vermont tradition of Green Up day; make Professor Frank Bryan proud by venturing out to Starksboro or Huntington or Underhill the first Tuesday of March and see for yourself that Town Meeting is alive and well and a vital cog in citizen democracy the way we do it here in the Green Mountains.

In taking those leaps into the unfamiliar, both in your academic work and beyond, you will find your greatest lessons—the ones that will help you discover your path in college and your passion in life. Know that these leaps will take courage, they will take imagination, they will take an open mind, and they will ultimately reward you in equal measure to your own commitment.

I welcome you today as someone who has known this university as a professor, as a dean, as a provost, and an interim president. More importantly, I've also known it in the role of those people who helped you move into the residence halls on Friday, took you out for dinner downtown before giving you a few words—"work hard, be safe," maybe even "have fun"—and a hug goodbye. Yes, I've been the parent of a UVM student, two, in fact. My wife Janet and I are proud to claim our son Daniel and our daughter Anna as UVM graduates.

Consider in the weeks ahead as you field perhaps more phone calls from home than you might like, that it could be worse. You could be freshman Anna Bramley... your father could be dean of your college... and he could have a first initial that makes his e-mail address dangerously similar to your e-mail address... and that father might occasionally get a stray e-mail from young men who think they are corresponding with his daughter but are, in fact, corresponding with the dean.

Well, you get the idea. The young men were terrified; Anna was mortified; and I... was mostly amused. This is one foible of freshman year that I trust none of you will have to worry about. But despite their somewhat challenging circumstance of family a little close for comfort, Anna and Daniel found their ways and made their space on this campus. I trust that you, too, will take this thrilling new freedom of

college life, use it well, and make the most of the opportunities before you.

And I should mention that this is not just the start of your college career, but the start of a lifelong relationship with your University. We are honored that with us today is Mr. Ted Madden, President of the UVM Alumni Association, representing nearly 100,000 alumni who have graduated from this special place. You will hear more from Ted later this evening.

So, my very best wishes to you all. We are pleased to have you with us and look forward to our journey together as members of the outstanding educational community that is the University of Vermont.